REFLECTIONS

ON

The Evidences of Chriſtianity.

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OF

CHRISTIANITY.

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PREFACE.

THE Author of the following pages, has neither time nor inclination for long and elaborate diſquiſitions. But conceiving the cauſe of Chriſtianity to be intimately connected with the virtue and happineſs of mankind, he could not refuſe to preſent to the public a few Thoughts on the Evi-

dences of this Religion, which appeared to himself at leaſt of ſome importance. Occupied by the duties of a laborious employment, and devoting his few leiſure moments to purſuits which have no immediate connexion with moral ſpeculations, and from which he finds himſelf unable long to abſtract his attention, he is aware that he may by no means have done juſtice to the cauſe which he has undertaken. But ſome of the hints now ſuggeſted, appeared to him of ſufficient conſequence to juſtify their publication, even with the errors by which they may be encompaſſed. And if the

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leaſt light is thereby thrown on the evidences of the beſt religion that ever appeared upon earth, his wiſhes will have been abundantly anſwered.

REFLECTIONS,

&c. &c.

IN every controverſy, it ſeems to be a matter of the firſt importance, that the queſtion in diſpute be fairly and clearly ſtated; and that it be previouſly ſettled what may reaſonably be expected from each of the contending parties. Without this, the ſimpleſt queſtions may be embarraſſed by endleſs litigation; and agreement of opinion never be obtained on points the moſt eaſy and demonſtrable. The queſtion reſpecting the Evidences of the Chriſtian Religion, appears, among

others, to have been involved in perplexity and doubt, from not attending to a maxim as obvious as it is important. Much has been ſaid on this intereſting ſubject, and yet the controverſy does not appear to approach to a legitimate termination; apparently becauſe it has not yet been accurately defined what each party may be demanded to eſtabliſh before the queſtion of victory can be decided.—The following ſtatement of the ſubject is ſubmitted to the conſideration of both Chriſtians and Unbelievers, as intended at leaſt, if not calculated, to bring them nearer to an agreement on one of the moſt important queſtions which can employ the enquiries of the human mind.

The Chriſtian Religion has exiſted for about 1800 years; and previous to this period it did *not* exiſt. It derives its origin

gin from a perſon called Jeſus Chriſt, who lived in Judea, and was crucified by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. A ſhort time after the death of its founder, it was preached in the Roman empire by a few of his followers, and gained encreaſing credit and eſtabliſhment, till at length it attained a decided pre-eminence above the Pagan religion and worſhip, which had prevailed there for many ages. This converſion of the Pagans to Chriſtianity, muſt be conſidered as one of the moſt ſignal Revolutions which ever took place upon earth, and as an event of which every philoſophical mind muſt wiſh to know the real and proper cauſes. The only hiſtory which appears to account for this ſingular phenomenon, is that of the New Teſtament; and this hiſtory conſiſts of a clear and diſtinct narrative of facts, which, if admitted, will readily ex-

plain this extraordinary Revolution. Hence ariſes a claim which this hiſtory lays to our attention, and likewiſe a ſtrong preſumption in its favour; as it muſt be allowed to ſtand in a very different predicament from a narrative of facts which will account for no exiſting phenomenon, and of which no monument, except the mere hiſtorical teſtimony, is extant. This preſumption is corroborated by the conſideration, that, as far as appears from the evidence of hiſtory, it was the credit that was actually given to the facts in queſtion, which occaſioned the gradually-encreaſing diffuſion and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity.

Let it now be conſidered by what methods, and by what alone, the credit of this hiſtory can be ſubverted.

Firſt,

Firſt, By proving the teſtimony in favour of the facts, to be defective and equivocal.

Secondly, By ſhewing the facts themſelves to be incredible.

Thirdly, By demonſtrating, that if the facts had taken place, different conſequences muſt have followed.

Fourthly, By proving that the exiſtence and progreſs of Chriſtianity are to be accounted for by cauſes altogether independent of the truth of the facts recorded in the hiſtory under conſideration.

In order to prove the teſtimony to be falſe or deficient, it muſt be ſhewn that there is not the ſame reaſon to believe the genuineneſs of the books of the New Teſta-

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ment as of other books of equal antiquity; or that the facts recorded are of ſuch a nature as to exclude certainty of information; or that the hiſtorians had no proper opportunity of aſcertaining their reality; or that, from certain rules of deciſion admitted in other caſes, there is reaſon to conclude that the veracity of theſe hiſtorians may juſtly be called in queſtion. But if it appear that the goſpel-hiſtory will abide the teſt of this enquiry, it muſt be concluded that no objection can be urged againſt the teſtimony, *in itſelf conſidered.* And let it be remarked, that this teſtimony, which is now ſuppoſed to have borne a fair and ſtrict examination, is ſtrongly corroborated by the original preſumption in favour of the facts which has been already ſtated: And that there ſhould be this concurrence of preſumption and teſtimony in favour of a mere impoſture, muſt be

conſidered

conſidered as very extraordinary and improbable. But this combination of evidence receives additional ſtrength and confirmation from the firm faith and pertinacity of the primitive believers; who maintained their attachment to a religion founded on the facts in queſtion, in defiance of contempt and perſecution, and even death itſelf. So that allowing, what has never been diſproved, that the teſtimony, in itſelf conſidered, is not objectionable, the general evidence in favour of Chriſtianity may be ſtated as follows:

The New Teſtament hiſtory poſſeſſes all the requiſite marks of credibility. It contains a narrative of facts which were confidently believed by numbers who lived at the time when they are reported to have happened. The belief of theſe facts prevailed and extended itſelf, in de-

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fiance of prejudice and oppoſition; and finally, produced the moſt ſignal and important conſequences: conſequences that are experienced at the preſent hour.

But in oppoſition to this hiſtorical and preſumptive evidence, it may be alledged, that the facts recorded in the hiſtory under conſideration, are in themſelves ſo incredible, as to be inadmiſſible upon teſtimony which, in itſelf conſidered, appears to be clear and unequivocal. It will be urged, that Miracles are in their very nature ſo extraordinary, as to carry in themſelves a refutation of any evidence by which they may appear to be attended. In reply to this objection, it may juſtly be remarked, that a Revelation is in itſelf a deviation from the order of nature; or, in other words, a Miracle; and that this original deviation muſt be confirmed by

other

other ſubſequent deviations, ſince it is utterly incredible that God ſhould commiſſion certain individuals to communicate his will to mankind, and not furniſh them with ſuch credentials as would prove the juſtice of their pretenſions as divine inſtructors. Thus it appears, that a hiſtory which profeſſes to contain an account of a divine communication is conſiſtent with itſelf in being likewiſe a narrative of miraculous events; and that of conſequence, the queſtion reſpecting the credibility of the facts recorded in the goſpel-hiſtory, reſolves itſelf into the previous queſtion, Is it credible that God ſhould communicate his will to mankind in an extraordinary and ſupernatural manner? Now let it be conſidered on what grounds (I mean on the principles of Theiſm) it is poſſible to affirm the *incredibility* of ſuch an interpoſition; and theſe

muſt

muſt be the three that follow. That ſuch an interpoſition is contrary to experience; to the divine perfections as diſcoverable by the light of nature; or, to the conduct of the divine government, which acts not by ſpecial interpoſition, but by general laws. To ſay that a divine revelation is contrary to experience, unleſs general experience be intended, is evidently to beg the queſtion; and to maintain that it contradicts the attributes of Deity, is to affirm much more than it would be poſſible to prove. And though God has appointed general laws for the government of his creatures, it by no means admits of *demonſtration* that he will never interfere in an extraordinary manner to effect purpoſes which could not be ſo well accompliſhed by the operation of general appointments. Thus, inſtead of its being affirmed that miracles, or a divine revela-

tion,

tion, are *incredible*, it ſhould rather be ſaid, that (judging from general experience, and what we know of the Divine conduct) they are attended with that kind of *improbability* which it requires clear and unequivocal teſtimony to counterbalance. For before the *incredibility* of any facts can be urged as deciſive againſt hiſtorical teſtimony, which, *in itſelf conſidered*, appears valid and ſatisfactory, this incredibility muſt be demonſtrated by an appeal to ſome clear and acknowledged principle; on which, if any dependence is to be placed on human reaſon, we may certainly and confidently depend. An incredibility which falls ſhort of this demonſtration, ought rather to be denominated an *improbability* ariſing from human ignorance: a definition which ſeems to apply with juſtice to the facts before us. It will indeed be allowed, that facts contrary to

general

general experience require ſtronger teſtimony in their favour, than ſuch events as fall under common and daily obſervation; but it is likewiſe notorious, that the higheſt degree of improbability ariſing merely from a want of experience, is perpetually overcome by ſuch evidence as is ſuppoſed to poſſeſs the proper recommendations to enforce belief; nor is it poſſible ſo nicely to appreciate the degree of evidence which is neceſſary to overbalance an improbability of the kind now ſpecified, as to define when it ought to be rejected; though it may, indeed, be obſerved in general, that an improbability ariſing from ignorance, is ſubject to no calculation, and therefore, that it may with propriety be received upon certain evidence which is capable of being valued and eſtimated.

It

It may likewiſe be obſerved, that unleſs miracles can be proved to be *impoſſible*, the Chriſtian may ſafely urge againſt the objection, that it is *incredible* that the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity, circumſtanced as they were, ſhould either have been deceived themſelves, or the voluntary deceivers of others; and that either ſide of the dilemma may be ſhewn to be incredible, by an appeal to the known phenomena of the human mind, and the acknowledged principles of human conduct; and that, between two difficulties, it will be wiſe to incline to that which has a poſitive teſtimony in its favour.

But it may be objected, that, allowing the validity of the teſtimony, and admitting likewiſe the credibility of the facts, the New Teſtament-hiſtory cannot be received by a Philoſophical enquirer, ſince, if the

facts

facts there recorded had really taken place, different conſequences muſt have followed; and all Judæa and the Roman empire, muſt have been immediately converted to the Chriſtian Faith. This objection it ſeems does not deny that the truth of the goſpel-hiſtory is a ſufficient cauſe of the Revolution which was effected by Chriſtianity, but merely affirms that this revolution muſt have been more extenſive, and its progreſs more rapid, had the facts in queſtion really exiſted. But as the ſufficiency of the cauſe to which the Chriſtian aſcribes the origin and diffuſion of Chriſtianity, is by the very objection acknowledged, thoſe reaſonings muſt be very clear and deciſive which will oblige him to reject it. But to approach nearer to the argument before us, it may be remarked, that a condition of ſociety may eaſily be imagined in which miracles wrought by

perſons

perſons previouſly obſcure, or who were deſpiſed on account of their nation or religion, would not produce univerſal and inſtantaneous conviction; and that our acquaintance with the prejudices and opinions of any period, muſt be very extenſive, and our knowledge of the probable operations of the human mind in ſuch a period, very juſt and accurate, before we can pronounce definitively upon the effect which miracles, wrought in certain circumſtances, would produce on the great body of a people. But that ſtrong prejudices againſt Chriſtianity did exiſt among both Jews and Gentiles, is a fact too notorious to be denied. Indeed, it cannot be ſuppoſed that the Jews, after having raiſed the clamour of *crucify him, crucify him*, would be very willing to receive Jeſus as a divine inſtructor: and with reſpect to the heathens, they muſt

have

have been indiſpoſed to admit the truth of Chriſtianity, from two very operative cauſes; the direct oppoſition between this new religion and that in which they had been educated; and the deſpiſed condition of the perſons by whom it was offered to their reception; as the Jews were held by the Pagans in univerſal contempt and abhorrence. * Add to this, that miracles would

* The ſtrength of the prejudices which were entertained againſt Chriſtianity by the Pagans, may be very well illuſtrated by the following paſſage of *Tacitus*:

Ergo abolendo rumori Nero ſubdidit reos, et quæſitiſſimis pœnis affecit, quos per flagitia inviſos, vulgas Chriſtianos appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Chriſtus, qui Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum ſupplicio affectus erat. Repreſſaque in præſens *exitiabilis ſuperſtitio* rurſus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam originem ejus

mali,

would not be regarded by the heathens as decisive proofs of a divine interposition, however

mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt, celebranturque. Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis contecti, laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defeciſſet dies in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et Circense ludibrium edebat, habitu aurigæ permixtus plebi, vel circulo insistens. Unde quanquam adversus sontes, et *novissima exempla* meritos, miseratio oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publica, sed in sævitiam unius absumerentur.

I respect the Antients as much as any man, and will yield to no man in admiration of their writings; but bigotry and a spirit of persecution I shall reprobate wherever I meet with it; and I appeal to any reader who is acquainted with the genuine

however certain the concluſion may appear to the more enlightened underſtanding of the preſent times. It may likewiſe be obſerved, that the heathens who were not converted to Chriſtianity in the earlier ages of the Chriſtian hiſtory, muſt have remained unbelievers, either becauſe their prejudices did not ſuffer them to pay any proper attention to the ſubject, or becauſe they were acquainted with the falſehood of the pretended miracles on which Chriſti-

principles of Chriſtianity, and capable of comparing the *exitiabilis ſuperſtitio* of the Chriſtian religion with the various ſuperſtitions of Paganiſm, whether our hiſtorian could have expreſſed his abhorrence of Chriſtianity in terms more diſproportionate to the caſe, or more *diſgraceful to himſelf!*

For my own part, I do not, like Mr. Gibbon, ſtand in need of any reflections to conſole me, that this bright ornament of human nature was not a Chriſtian.

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anity depends. If the latter alternative be adopted, how comes it to paſs that reports of facts which were known to be falſe, were never contradicted, and that it ſhould not appear upon the *ſlighteſt evidence*, that the truth of the facts had ever been controverted. If theſe obſervations do not remove the difficulty, it may be aſked, How can the belief of thoſe who did receive Chriſtianity be accounted for, upon ſuppoſition that the facts on which it profeſſes to depend, are falſe? It may perhaps be replied, that this fact may be explained by the natural credulity of the human mind, and that love of the marvellous, which has ſhewn itſelf in every age and nation. But will not the force of prejudice, equally natural to the human mind, juſt as well account for the non-converſion of the remainder who were not converted? When the unbeliever ſhall have explained

the operation of credulity, and the love of the marvellous, and have ſhewn that theſe principles will account for the relinquiſhment of early religious aſſociations and the adoption of opinions totally different from thoſe that had been impreſſed by education, confirmed by habit, and ſupported by every conſideration of advantage, and that upon an appeal to facts that never exiſted, — the Chriſtian philoſopher will engage to define the power and action of prejudice, ſo as to prove that the cleareſt evidence will make no impreſſion on the mind that will not attend to it, and that even the majority of a people under the bias of this prejudice, would not be convinced againſt confirmed aſſociation and intereſt, even by miracles wrought in ſuch circumſtances as attended thoſe recorded in the goſpel-hiſtory. It may farther be remarked, that the prejudices which were

entertained

entertained againſt Chriſtianity, appear moſt manifeſtly from the perſecution which it ſuffered; whereas that Chriſtians received the principles of the goſpel through credulity and a love of the marvellous, is a mere aſſumption, totally deſtitute of hiſtorical evidence. But, indeed, the difficulties now conſidered in contraſt, admit of no compariſon; and while the one is altogether *inexplicable*, the other, at leaſt as far as it reſpects the heathens, admits an eaſy ſolution; as they on whom the evidence of the miracles did not *obtrude* itſelf, and theſe would neceſſarily be the majority, would pay little attention to facts from which the Chriſtians drew what they would deem *impious* and *impoſſible* concluſions.

Theſe obſervations naturally lead to the conſideration of the fourth method, by which the evidences of the Chriſtian re-

ligion may be oppoſed; by proving that the truth of the facts contained in the goſpel-hiſtory was not the real cauſe of the exiſtence and progreſs of Chriſtianity. And here it muſt be conceded, that if the reality of the facts on which Chriſtianity is ſuppoſed to reſt, was not the primary and only real cauſe of its progreſſive eſtabliſhment, there will remain but little reaſon to give credit to the goſpel-hiſtory, ſince the truth of theſe facts muſt be conſidered as a cauſe fully adequate to the effect in queſtion; and therefore, if the effect did not follow from them, no better argument is needed to prove that the cauſe ſuppoſed did not exiſt. But it muſt be obſerved, on the other hand, that if the evidence in favour of the goſpel-hiſtory has not been already invalidated, and retains its undiminiſhed authority previous to this attack on it authenticity, the contrary

trary evidence muſt be very clear and convincing before this hiſtory can with juſtice be rejected. Nothing in fact will avail but evidence, which ſhall be clearer and more authentic than can be produced in favour of the hiſtory, the credit of which is to be ſubverted. It will not be ſufficient to ſay that the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity might be enthuſiaſts or deceivers, and thus might have impoſed on the credulity of their inconſiderate hearers; it will be neceſſary to ſpecify *which* they were in reality, and to produce evidence in favour of one ſide or other of the alternative; and likewiſe to prove upon well-authenticated teſtimony, that the mere credulity of the people to whom they addreſſed themſelves, procured credit to their doctrine. When the Chriſtian is aſked how the great revolution, which was effected by Chriſtianity is to be accounted

for, he immediately replies, By the evidence of the facts on which this religion profeſſes to depend; and he produces a hiſtory of theſe facts, which he maintains to be attended with all the requiſite marks of genuineneſs and truth; and if the unbeliever, without *previouſly* ſubverting the credit of this hiſtory, attempts to prove its falſehood, by unfolding the origin and explaining the progreſs of Chriſtianity, it is obvious that this attempt muſt be made on the evidence of the cleareſt and moſt deciſive teſtimony; and that the cauſes to which the riſe and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity ſhall be thus aſcribed, muſt have no connexion, even of the remoteſt kind, with the truth of the controverted facts.

Thus have I conſidered the different methods by which the evidences of the Chriſtian religion may be fairly and properly oppugned;

pugned; and it may, perhaps with juſtice, be ſaid, that if the unbeliever has not a *decided* advantage in the management of one or other of the objections which have been here allowed him, Chriſtianity muſt be regarded as ſtanding upon a ſecure and ſtable baſis. A queſtion of hiſtory, and ſuch is the truth of the Chriſtian religion, can be inveſtigated only upon the principles which have been pointed out above; and it muſt for ever be acknowledged to be a marvellous and incredible circumſtance, that when every legitimate method of attack has been permitted,—in no one ſhould any clear advantage be gained againſt a narrative which (if it be not true) is a ſhameleſs, impudent impoſture.

Credat Judæus apella.—Non ego.

It is likewiſe but juſt to obſerve, that it would be unfair and unphiloſophical to

reject Chriſtianity, becauſe ſome doubt may remain in the mind after each objection has been replied to. Demonſtration is not to be expected in a moral queſtion, and eſpecially in one of a complicated nature; but, it might reaſonably be expected, that if Chriſtianity were founded on falſehood, the unbeliever would be found to have a *manifeſt* advantage in ſome one or other of the legitimate methods of diſcovering the cheat. Upon the whole, one cannot help concluding, that if this religion be an impoſture, it was the moſt happy in its contrivance, the moſt dexterous in its management, and the moſt magnificent in its effects, that ever deluded the credulity of mankind. It is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a *unique* in the creation. — *Nec viget quicquam ſimile aut ſecundum.*

But

But I ſhould not do juſtice to my ſubject, were I to leave unnoticed certain other objections to Chriſtianity, drawn, not from a defect of teſtimony, or the incredibility of the facts, or from any conſiderations of this nature,—but from circumſtances connected with this religion, and concluſions to be admitted by thoſe who receive it. Of this kind are in particular the following: The partial diffuſion of this religion, ſuppoſed to be divine; the incapacity of mankind in general to judge of its evidences; the little good which has followed its publication; and the abſurdity of the Scripture-doctrine of a Reſurrection.

Before I conſider theſe objections ſeparately, I ſhall premiſe an obſervation which will apply to them all; and which does not appear to have been ſufficiently attended to. It is this: That, as the moſt

obvious and proper method of attack is now relinquiſhed; and objections urged againſt Chriſtianity which do not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, apply to it as a queſtion of hiſtory, thoſe principles muſt be clear and demonſtrable from which theſe objections are to be derived. Chriſtianity is a religion ſupported by teſtimony; and, in order to prove the pretenſions of this religion to be falſe, the true and legitimate method of proceeding is, by bringing it to the teſt of thoſe *criteria* which are uſually applied in caſes of an hiſtorical nature. At the ſame time, it will not be denied, that caſes may occur in which teſtimony, apparently authentic, may and ought to be rejected; but, in theſe caſes, the teſtimony is ſuppoſed directly to contradict ſome well known and eſtabliſhed maxim; ſuch as carries with it the fulleſt evidence of its truth. Thus, in tales of witch-

witchcraft, apparitions, &c. the philoſopher would think himſelf juſtifiable in neglecting teſtimony which, in other caſes, would compel belief. But in theſe inſtances the *facts themſelves* are deemed incredible; whereas, in the preſent inſtance, the objections are brought not againſt the facts, but againſt certain concluſions which follow from the admiſſion of them. But in *no caſe* can this method of oppoſing hiſtorical evidence be properly employed, unleſs the axioms which are thus brought in oppoſition to the teſtimony, are of ſuch a nature, that to reject them would be to bid defiance to the plaineſt concluſions of the human mind.

Let the objections above mentioned be now ſeparately conſidered. It is then ſaid, that a religion which really proceeded from God, could never have been limited to a

ſmall

ſmall number of the human race, but muſt, like the benevolence of its Author, have been extended to them all. To this it may be replied, That a gradation of privilege is the favourite law of nature, and that moral advantages are, *in fact*, allotted to mankind in very different degrees; ſo that the objection, if it has any force, muſt be urged not againſt Chriſtianity, but againſt the whole œconomy of the divine government.

But it is farther affirmed, that the generality of mankind are not qualified to determine upon the evidences of the Chriſtian religion; and that it cannot be ſuppoſed that a religion ſhould proceed from God, of which the proof ſhould not be equally clear and intelligible to all. Of this objection, as of the preceding, it may be obſerved, that the reaſoning on which it is

founded,

founded, contradicts a general principle of the divine adminiſtration. It is a fact too notorious to be diſputed, that the lower claſſes of mankind, who have not leiſure and ability to enquire into the evidence of important truth, depend for information upon thoſe ſuperior claſſes who poſſeſs the opportunities which are denied to them. And whatever had been the evidences of the Chriſtian religion, multitudes in the loweſt ſtation of ſociety muſt ſtill have remained incompetent judges of its truth, unleſs a perpetual miracle had been wrought to remedy the inconvenience.

But the objection before us may perhaps be anſwered in a more compendious manner, by obſerving, that the moſt ignorant, as well as the beſt informed of men, are capable of feeling the force of Chriſtianity;

anity; which is infinitely more important than deciding upon its evidence.

But we are now to encounter an objection apparently more formidable and alarming; that Chriſtianity has been the cauſe of great and public evils; and that it is altogether problematical whether it has done ſervice or diſſervice to the cauſe which it profeſſes to promote,—that of virtue and happineſs. On this objection it may be obſerved, that the evil which has reſulted from Chriſtianity, has been purely adventitious, and that it is ſome argument of its excellence if it has done any good at all, amidſt the general perverſion of its principles, and the enormous accumulation of abſurdity with which it has been encumbered. And it will be allowed by unprejudiced enquirers, that Chriſtianity is now better underſtood than it has been for many

many ages; and that by the aid of learning and criticiſm, its genuine principles have been unfolded, and their unadulterated excellence diſplayed; ſo that it muſt be admitted to be probable, that the evil complained of, will gradually be diminiſhed; and, ſhould the time arrive when Chriſtianity ſhall be profeſſed in its primitive purity, conſiſting ſimply of the doctrines of a perfect Deity, an over-ruling Providence, and the immortality of man, it is hard to ſee what evil could ariſe directly or indirectly from ſuch a religion. Indeed, if this is not religion, there is no ſuch thing. And if theſe doctrines are admitted at all, it is difficult to conceive that their influence ſhould be more injurious, in conſequence of their being received upon the evidence of fact.

With

With reſpect indeed to the latter article, that of a future life, it may perhaps be conſidered as ſtanding or falling with Chriſtianity; or at leaſt it may be affirmed, that he who confidently expects to ſurvive the grave from the mere light of nature, poſſeſſes more credulity than is ſufficient to make a Chriſtian. But that the objection before us may be encountered in all its force, let it rather be replied, that before this argument can be urged with effect againſt Chriſtianity, two very nice and difficult queſtions muſt be decided. Firſt, What is the preciſe balance between the good which has reſulted from Chriſtianity, and the evil to which it has given riſe? Secondly, As evil muſt be ſuppoſed to attend every thing which paſſes through the hands of ſuch an imperfect creature as man,

man, what balance of good may reaſonably be expected from a divine revelation?

But it is ſaid, that, according to the modern hypotheſis which refers the phenomena of perception and thought to the organization of matter, the Scripture-doctrine of a reſurrection involves an impoſſibility; as conſciouſneſs once interrupted by the diſſolution of the ſubſtance, in which it exiſted, can be reſtored by no power whatever. Before any weight can be allowed to this objection, the real cauſe of perception and conſciouſneſs muſt be fully and clearly explained; whereas, at preſent, we know nothing of either but their exiſtence. Philoſophy indeed ſeems to favour the ſuppoſition, that perception reſults from a certain organization of matter; but how this conſequence follows the organization, we ſtill remain profoundly ignorant;

ignorant: and judging *a priori*, we ſhould have pronounced it *impoſſible*, that any combination whatever of particles previouſly impercipient, ſhould produce a percipient being. Indeed, whatever hypotheſis we adopt to explain the phenomena of perception, thought, and conſciouſneſs in man, we tread on the very verge of *contradiction*; and this appears to be one of the beſt reaſons for reſting ſatisfied with the firſt apparent abſurdity, and ſuppoſing that theſe phenomena depend, though we know not how, on a peculiar organization of matter. But to revert to the obſervation with which theſe objections were introduced, it appears, from the conſiderations now ſuggeſted, that the argument againſt the poſſibility of a reſurrection, by no means reſts upon a ſpecies of evidence ſufficiently clear and convincing to be urged as deciſive againſt hiſtorical teſtimony.

mony. A reſurrection, upon the principles of materialiſm, may indeed be *incomprehenſible*; but it would be difficult to prove it more incomprehenſible than the doctrine on which the objection is founded: and it may ſafely be predicted, that he who ſhall point out the connexion between a certain organized ſyſtem of impercipient matter and the property of perception, will be able to ſhew the poſſibility of reſtoring conſciouſneſs that has been loſt by the diſſolution of the ſubſtance in which it originally inhered. And let it be remarked in connexion with the preſent ſubject, as at leaſt a ſingular circumſtance, that while the wiſer heathen philoſophers reſted their hopes of immortality on a foundation which modern philoſophy rejects, namely, the exiſtence of a principle in man totally diſtinct from the body which it inhabits,—the firſt teachers of Chriſt-

Chriſtianity ſhould have confidently built the doctrine of a future ſtate on the only baſis on which, according to the hypotheſis of materialiſm, it can poſſibly reſt, that of a RESURRECTION.

THE END

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NOTIS ILLUSTRAVIT

IN USUM

STUDIOSÆ JUVENTUTIS,

E. COGAN.

The Author is conſcious of ſeveral conſiderable errors in the above performance, which, if ever it be reprinted, he will correct, and add ſome illuſtrations which, through haſte, eſcaped him.

APPENDIX

TO

REFLECTIONS

ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

By E. COGAN.

Μη νεμεσα βαιοισι, χαρις βαιοισιν οπηδει.

APPENDIX.

IN the introduction to a ſmall pamphlet lately preſented to the public, on the Evidences of Chriſtianity, I ventured an opinion, that the controverſy between Chriſtian Philoſophers and their Opponents has been prolonged by the want of ſuch a ſtatement of the ſubject as ſhould preſent a diſtinct view of the points to be aſcertained and eſtabliſhed by the two contending parties. Under the impreſſion of this idea, I have employed ſome far-

ther reflection on the ſubject, and feel myſelf more convinced than ever, that a careful conſideration of the difficulties attending the belief and the rejection of Chriſtianity, will turn the balance in favour of the Chriſtian. I ſhall, therefore, without offering any other apology than a deſire to promote the beſt of cauſes, proceed to explain rather more accurately the reaſons why Chriſtianity ought to be received, and to ſtate the only principles on which it can be philoſophically rejected.

The facts of the New Teſtament-hiſtory will, if admitted, account for one of the moſt extraordinary events that has taken place in the hiſtory of mankind; the riſe, progreſs, and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity; in which ſingular phenomenon

menon muſt be included the gradual downfall of Pagan Idolatry throughout the Roman empire. Theſe facts, beſides poſſeſſing the advantage of explaining ſo extraordinary a revolution, have a poſitive teſtimony in their favour: a teſtimony which has ſtood the teſt of ſtrict and impartial examination. The general hiſtory of the times in which theſe events are ſaid to have taken place, furniſhes ſeveral ſtrong preſumptions of their truth, both of a poſitive and negative kind. It appears from indiſputable teſtimony, that theſe facts were believed by numbers who muſt have had at leaſt the opportunity of enquiring into their truth. It appears farther, that the belief of theſe facts was, if not the only, the principal and *primary* cauſe of that extraordinary revolution which was effected by the

promulgation of Chriſtianity. Nor does hiſtory record the operation of any other cauſes as contributing to the production of this effect, but ſuch as preſuppoſe the truth of the facts in queſtion. And, moreover, though Chriſtianity, in a very early ſtage of its progreſs, was the object of hatred and perſecution, it does not appear that the facts on which it profeſſes to depend were ever controverted: — And ſtronger preſumptions than theſe of the truth of any hiſtory, cannot reaſonably be expected. The origin and diffuſion of Chriſtianity, as including the downfal of an eſtabliſhed religion, is a phenomenon which requires a cauſe; and the Goſpel-hiſtory furniſhes a narrative of facts which will explain this phenomenon; and poſſeſſes this extraordinary recommendation, that the effect to be accounted for,

appears

appears, from the general evidence of hiſtory, to have been produced by the belief of the facts which are there recorded. A hiſtory ſo circumſtanced cannot be rejected but for very weighty reaſons; and whether any ſuch reaſons can be adduced, is, or ought to be, the queſtion between the Philoſophical Chriſtian and the Unbeliever.

Dr. Prieſtley, in his Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever (a work truly ineſtimable) has the following paragraph: "With reſpect to *hypotheſes*, to explain appearances of any kind, the Philoſophical Chriſtian conſiders himſelf as bound to admit that which (according to the received rules of philoſophizing, or reaſoning) is the moſt probable; ſo that the queſtion between him and other phi-

loſophers is, Whether his hypotheſis or theirs will beſt explain the *known facts*, ſuch as are the preſent belief of Judaiſm and Chriſtianity, and alſo the belief of them in the earlieſt ages to which they can be traced?" With deference to an authority which I ſo highly reſpect, I ſhould rather ſay, that the New Teſtament-hiſtory, conſidering the ſtrong preſumptions in its favour, muſt of neceſſity be admitted, unleſs it can be proved, either that the facts which it records are incredible, or that, admitting the credibility of the facts, different conſequences muſt have followed, had the facts been real. Until the unbeliever ſhall have eſtabliſhed one or other of theſe propoſitions, every hypotheſis to account for the origin and progreſs of Chriſtianity muſt be *unneceſſary*, and ought of courſe to be rejected. And

when

when he ſhall have made it to appear, either that the facts cannot be admitted, whatever phenomena they will explain, or that the conſequences muſt have been different, had the facts been real, he need not conſider it as incumbent upon *him* rather than the Chriſtian, to account for the origin and progreſs of Chriſtianity.

Let theſe propoſitions be now ſeparately conſidered:

1ſt. The facts of the Goſpel-hiſtory are incredible, though they have a poſitive teſtimony in their favour, and, if admitted, will explain a very extraordinary phenomenon which ſtands to be accounted for.

Though it might be juſtifiable to throw the *onus probandi* on the unbeliever, it may not be improper to ſtate a few conſiderations, to ſhew that the facts contended for by the Chriſtian are not of ſuch a nature as to be inadmiſſible upon proper and ſufficient evidence.

That there is ſuch a thing as a courſe of nature, though we know not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the laws by which it is effected, every one will acknowledge; and that this courſe of nature, or order of events, was eſtabliſhed by the Creator of the univerſe, no Theiſt will diſpute. But that He who appointed this order of things *can* for important purpoſes effect a deviation from it, muſt be obvious to every one. Thus, that, on the principles of Theiſm, miracles are *poſsible* events, will be univerſally

verſally admitted. In what then does their *incredibility* conſiſt? In a deviation from an eſtabliſhed order of things, which he who appointed it, it is allowed, can interrupt. So that the objection, properly ſtated, is ſimply this: — The Author of nature will not, *on any occaſion*, or for *any purpoſe*, effect a deviation from the general courſe of nature.

It is farther to be obſerved, that miracles, as a confirmation of a divine revelation, cannot be deemed *incredible*, unleſs it can be proved to be *incredible* that the Deity ſhould make a communication of his will to mankind, or that he ſhould make this revelation to a few for the general good. But on what principles can either of theſe poſitions be eſtabliſhed? Mr. Paine has indeed affirmed, that it is a

contradiction in terms, to call any thing a revelation which comes to a perſon at ſecond hand, either verbally, or in writing. And by this ſage diſcovery, he ſeems to imagine that he has laid the axe to the root of the tree, and ſubverted the whole ſyſtem of revealed religion. But this obſervation involves a mere diſpute about a *word*, and ought not to have inſulted the underſtanding of mankind in an *Age of Reaſon*. Admitting the poſſibility, and ſuppoſing for argument ſake, the truth of miracles, it ſignifies nothing by what name a divine communication eſtabliſhed by them may be called. And it may be obſerved, that the method of employing the few to inſtruct the many, poſſeſſes the advantage of being conformable to analogy. From theſe conſiderations, it appears that the incredibility of miracles reſolves itſelf

into

into a mere *improbability* arising from ignorance; which surely is not a sufficient ground for rejecting such an accumulation of evidence as is to be adduced in favour of the miracles of the Gospel-history.

It is farther to be observed, that an improbability arising from a want of analogy, may be more or less credible according to the magnitude of the phenomena which are to be explained by the admission of it. A miracle which, if believed, accounts for no phenomenon of consequence, and a miracle, or set of miracles, which will explain a great and important effect for which a sufficient cause is wanting, must be allowed to be very differently circumstanced in point of credibility. And a less degree of *positive testimony* will be necessary to establish the latter

latter than the former; ſo that, unleſs it can be proved that *nothing* can juſtify the belief of a miracle, which can never be proved but on the ground of its *impoſſibility*, to urge the mere abſtract incredibility of miracles, amounts to little more than begging the queſtion. To lay it down as an axiom, that no deviation from the order of nature can ever take place; or to aſſume it as a principle, that God will *not* reveal his will to mankind in a ſupernatural manner, may fortify the mind againſt conviction, but will not weaken any ſubſtantial evidence of miracles, except by taking for granted the thing to be proved. It has indeed been ſaid, that, allowing the poſſibility of miracles, no teſtimony can juſtify the belief of them, ſince the falſehood of human teſtimony can never be ſo extraordinary as the truth

of

of the miracle which the teſtimony profeſſes to eſtabliſh. This objection has been repeatedly and ſatisfactorily anſwered; I ſhall therefore content myſelf with obſerving, that we can value the evidence of human teſtimony upon certain clear and intelligible principles; but that, with reſpect to the improbability of a divine revelation confirmed by miracles, an improbability ariſing merely from a defect of analogy, and appealing to ignorance alone, we can form no judgment about it; and that therefore, in *certain circumſtances*, ſuch a revelation may be rationally admitted. I grant, that a miracle wrought for nothing, would be marvellous indeed; and ſhould ſuch a miracle be confirmed by teſtimony, which it would be impoſſible to reject, ſuch a caſe would be perplexing to the laſt degree, and would amaze the

very

very faculty of eyes and ears. But where the importance of the deſign, and the magnitude of the effect appear to juſtify the miracle, it is certainly *poſſible* that there may be ſufficient reaſon to admit it. And let me be allowed to ſay, that, in this view conſidered, it is *poſſible* that the miracles of the New Teſtament may gain increaſing credibility.

Let me now aſk, Whether miracles *may* not be admitted as a cauſe of a phenomenon confeſſedly extraordinary, and of which hiſtory offers no other explanation? It is indeed ſaid, that if any principles, independent of miracles, will account for the riſe and progreſs of Chriſtianity, the miracles of the New Teſtament ought to be rejected. Granted; but on ſuppoſition that the cauſe to which the unbeliever

ſhall

ſhall aſcribe this ſingular phenomenon, ſhall appear to have exiſted, and ſhall be demonſtrably equal to the effect in queſtion. Otherwiſe, a cauſe which involves no abſurdity, and which is credibly affirmed to have exiſted, and which appears from hiſtory to have produced the effect to be accounted for, has a decided claim to be preferred.

But, 2dly, Had the facts of the New Teſtament-hiſtory been real, different conſequences muſt have enſued, and all Judæa and the Roman empire muſt have been immediately converted to the Chriſtian faith. But that this objection is not deciſive, will appear from combining the force of the two following obſervations: Few, comparatively, could have been eye-witneſſes of the miracles in queſtion. Prejudices

judices of the ſtrongeſt kind againſt Chriſtianity, exiſted among both Jews and Gentiles. Now that theſe prejudices will not account for the ſlow and partial progreſs of Chriſtianity, allowing it to have been as ſlow and as partial as any unbeliever will maintain it to have been, can never be proved, unleſs it can be demonſtrated, that *no* prejudice can reſiſt the credible report of miracles. And on what *data* this demonſtration is to proceed, it will be difficult to ſay. The mind is certainly indiſpoſed to receive any fact in proportion as it is averſe to the concluſion to be admitted upon the belief of the fact; and with *certain* prejudices, it is probable, that no evidence of fact, any more than of argument, would be attended to. I think Mr. Paine ſomewhere ſays, that he would not have believed the reſurrection of Jeſus,

without

without ocular and manual demonſtration; and yet he too urges the unbelief of the Jews, as a proof that this event never really took place.

——— nil fuit unquam
Sic impar ſibi.

But it will now be proper to conſider the cauſes to which the unbeliever muſt aſcribe the origin and progreſs of Chriſtianity; and theſe muſt be the following, Impoſture and Credulity. On this hypotheſis it may be obſerved, that it is gratuitous, and erected in oppoſition to hiſtorical teſtimony; and that the exigence of the caſe does not require it. Moreover, the operation which is aſſigned to Impoſture and Credulity by the unbeliever, can never be proved to be conformable to analogy; though

though it might reaſonably be expected that an hypotheſis which ſhould be aſſumed for no other purpoſe than to avoid admitting what contradicts analogy, ſhould poſſeſs the advantage of being itſelf analogous to the ordinary courſe of events, and free from the difficulty which it was invented to avoid. But was it ever heard of ſince the world began, that an impoſture, *appealing to public facts*, produced a total change in the religious aſſociations of a large community? And with reſpect to what impoſture *can* effect, we muſt be allowed to judge by what it *has* effected. Upon the whole, the difference between the hypotheſes of the Chriſtian and the Unbeliever, may be ſtated as follows: The Chriſtian attributes the riſe, progreſs, and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, to a cauſe which indeed contradicts analogy, but

which

which is affirmed upon proper evidence to have existed; and which appears to have actually produced the effect to be accounted for. The Unbeliever erects, in opposition, an hypothesis *not* supported by testimony, and which can never be proved to be more conformable to analogy than the very facts which it is invented to overthrow.

But as miracles are strongly objected to by unbelievers, on the ground of incredibility, it may not be foreign to the general object of these few pages, to state one or two presumptions in their favour, which may be regarded as important. There are only two religions existing upon earth which profess to be established on public notorious miracles; namely, the Jewish and the Christian: and there appertain

to

to both theſe religions circumſtances which are beſt explained upon the ſuppoſition that they are really divine. The Jews, it is acknowledged, were inferior to other nations in every ſpecies of polite literature, and in general ſcience. And yet, though ſurrounded by idolaters, they maintained, as a community, the unity of God, and entertained more exalted and rational views of the divine perfections than even the wiſer philoſophers of the moſt poliſhed nations. The Chriſtian religion is confeſſedly the moſt pure and philoſophical that ever appeared upon earth; containing principles moſt highly beneficial to the general intereſts of mankind, and preſenting a ſtandard of morality, to which no objection can be made. Not to demand of the Unbeliever a cauſe of theſe remarkable phe-

 nomena,

nomena, ſo contrary to the analogy of fraud and folly, it may be obſerved that theſe extraordinary facts are beſt explained by admitting the miracles of the Old and New Teſtament, and that they are ſtriking confirmations of their truth.

THE END.

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